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ABSTRACT

The study aims to answer the following questions: (1) What emotions do mothers show in their preschoolers' presence? (2) What are their children's reactions to these emotional displays? (3) How do mothers cope with these feelings? (4) How do mothers evaluate these incidents? (5) Do mothers' methods of coping predict children's adjustment? Twenty children between the ages of 31 and 54 months and their mothers participated in this study. Children's social-emotional competence was assessed by way of a puppet task, classroom observations, teacher ratings, and sociometric techniques. Mothers' emotional displays with their children present and methods of coping were assessed by a diary technique and a semi-structured interview. Results indicated that mothers' frequency of happiness, lower frequency of anger and tension, and explanation of negative emotions were related to social-emotional competence variables of their children. Mothers' apologies for displaying negative emotions were more complex in their relation to social-emotional competence. Mothers who reported that anger could be beneficial had children who exhibited deficiencies in social-emotional competence. Further research should focus on the effects of mothers' discrete emotions on young children's expression of, understanding of, and reaction to emotions. (Author/BN)

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PRESCHOOLERS' MOTHERS' EXPRESSION OF AND COPING WITH EMOTION

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ABSTRACT

The aims of this study are as follows: (1) What emotions do mothers show in their preschoolers' presence? (2) What are their children's reactions to these emotional displays? (3) How do mothers cope with these feelings? (4) How do mothers evaluate these incidents? (5) Do mothers' methods of coping predict children's adjustment and social-emotional competence? 20 children and their mothers participated in this study, in which children's social-emotional competence was assessed in various ways, and mothers' emotions displayed with their children present, and methods of coping with them, were assessed by a diary technique and a semi-structured interview. Results indicated that emotions mothers display, reactions given by children, and mothers' attempts to cope with affectively charged situations were non-random. Frequency of happiness, lower frequency of anger and tension, and explaining negative emotions were related to social-emotional competence variables. Apologizing for displaying negative emotions was more complex in its relation to social-emotional competence. Mothers who reported that anger could be beneficial had children who exhibited deficiencies in social-emotional competence. Further research should focus on the effects of mothers' discrete emotions on young children's expression of , understanding of, and reaction to emotions.

PRESCHOOLERS' MOTHERS' EXPRESSION OF AND COPING WITH EMOTION

Susanne A. Denham

The topic of socialization of emotion is receiving increasing attention (Lewis & Saarni, 1986). This focus is potentially very important to the delineation of developmental psychopathology in general and the roots of resilience to stress in particular. Research data support the notions that children's understanding of differing emotions increases over the preschool years (Michalson & Lewis, 1986), and that expression of different emotions changes over the course of the first few years of life (Izard, 1971).

It is evident that the socializing agent in this socialization of emotion is often merely implicit; the child is assumed to be increasingly under the socializing influence of parents and other enculturating agents, especially peers, as s/he matures (Camras, 1986). Exceptions to this trend appear in the work of Camras (1986), Crockenberg (1985), and the NIMH Laboratory of Developmental Psychology (Cummings et al., 1981; Radke-Yarrow et al, 1986). Camras et al. (1986) found that abusive mothers differ from normal and neglectful mothers in expression, understanding, and reaction to emotion; likewise, so do their children. Radke-Yarrow et al. in part of an ongoing longitudinal study, are also finding relations between the emotions expressed by depressed mothers and their children, and differences on these dimensions between depressed and non-depressed mother-child pairs. Cummings et al. (1981) demonstrated the disregulatory effects of environmental anger on toddlers; Crockenberg (1985; see also Denham, 1985) has similarly

found that maternal anger, even in psychologically normal mothers, is related to lower social-emotional competence in preschoolers. It is clear that maternal emotional displays and handling of emotions are likely to influence similar aspects of the child's social-emotional development.

Given the general lack of explict examination of the relation between maternal and child emotions, and the direction in which the few explicit studies point, the aims of this study are as follows: (1) What emotions do mothers show in their preschoolers' presence? (2) What are their children's reactions to these emotional displays? (3) How do mothers cope with these feelings? (4) How do mothers evaluate these incidents? (5) Do mothers' methods of coping predict children's adjustment and social-emtional competence?

It was predicted that (1) Mothers would report displaying a variety of emotions, but predominantly happy and angry; (2) children would show a patter of specific reactions to specific emotins, such as ignoring or persisting after mataernal anger, and matching maternal happiness; (3) Mothers would show specific coping efforts to the differing emotions, particularly explaining their anger, being tender when happy, etc.; (4) Mothers would evaluate their expression of happiness positivelyl, but their experiences of anger negatively; (5) Mothers emotions and coping would be related to child adjustment--e.g., angry mothers would be likely to have angry, less socially competent children (see also Denham, 1985).

Method

Subjects were 20 children aged 31-54 months and their mothers. Measures were as follows: (1) Children: (a) Understanding of emotions was tested via a puppet measure; (b) rates of emotions (happy, sad, angry, hurt, afraid) and reactions to peer emotions (matching helping, etc.) were measured observationally in the preschool classroom. (c) Teachers rated the children's social competence via the Baumrind Preschool Behavior Q-Sort and Behar Problem Behavior Questionnaire (PBQ). (d) Peer sociometric ratings were gathered using Asher et al's picture technique.

(2) Mothers: (a) Emotional displays, children's reactions, maternal coping methods, and maternal evaluation of the situation were coded from emotion diaries which mothers were trained to maintain (Crockenberg, 1985; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1979); (b) A semi-structured interview covering essentially the same information as the emotion diary was added for convergent data.

Results and Discussion

Mothers reported a variety of emotions on the diary (most directed at the children; mean = 6.33, s.d. = 4.39), but predominantly happy and angry (X^2 (3) = 39.94, $p < .001$). There were no significant differences in the intensity reported in the interview for anger, sadness, and tension. Anger, however, was reportedly experienced more intensely than happiness ($t = 2.14$ $p < .06$). In terms of reported frequency on the interview, happiness was reportedly experienced more often than anger, sadness or tension ($ts = 2.49, 6.41, 5.41$, $ps < .02, .001, .001$, respectively), whereas anger was experienced more frequently than

sadness or tension (ts = 2.49, 2.57, respectively, $p < .02$). Sadness and tension were experienced similarly. Higher intensity of interview-reported happiness was reflected in children's lesser behavior problems (PBQ Total Score; $F = 6.46$, $p = .02$) and greater cooperativeness ($F = 4.16$, $p < .05$) in the classroom. Mothers who reported a higher intensity of tension tended to have sadder children as rated by the PBQ Unhappy/Miserable factor ($F = 4.01$, $p < .07$).

Children's reactions to their mothers' emotions, as reported by mothers in their diaries, were also non-random ($X^2(9) = 78.28$, $p < .001$). They most often ignored sad and angry displays by their mother, complied after anger, cried after maternal anger or tension, and matched happiness. Coping attempts given by mothers in diaries likewise were non-random ($X^2(27) = 112.97$, $p < .001$). Mothers predominantly acted tenderly to their children after their own happy displays, used affectively-toned explanations or punishment after their anger, non-affective explanations after sadness or tenseness, or directed no behavior toward their child when tense. Although all mothers reported (during the interview) being able to achieve an "even keel" with their children after negative emotion, diary data partially belied this assertion. On their diaries, mothers reported situations' resolutions as unsatisfactory after anger and as excellent after happy situations ($X^2(6) = 48.77$, $p < .001$).

Table 1 shows correlations between maternal emotion variables and child competence variables. Correlational data ($p < .10$ or better) show that those mothers who reported on the

interview that they explained their negative emotions had children who were: happier, less angry, more emotionally expressive, more competent, and less aggressive as rated by teachers, and less often ignored peers' emotions. Those who reported in the interview that they apologized for negative emotions had children who more often expressed hurt and demonstrated less affective knowledge on the puppet measure. However, apologies for sad displays and apologies for tension affected child competencies and behavioral adjustment differentially (see table 2 for these results). Those who recorded more anger on the diary had children who were: sadder (observational variable), less able to label emotion expression and situations, and rated more negatively on the sociometric measure. They were also less prosocial in response to peers' emotions.

Not surprisingly mothers reported in the interview that expression of happiness helped a situation more than anger, sadness, or tension (ts = 3.56, 1.96, 6.54; ps < .01, .07, .001, respectively). They also reported that anger was less conducive to positive outcomes than either sadness or tension (ts = 2.69, 2.06, ps < .02, .06, respectively). Sadness and tension were evaluated similarly. Those mothers who thought that anger helps rather than hinders situations had children lower on competence as rated by teachers (achievement, purposiveness, tractability, cooperativeness, friendliness) and higher on aggressiveness, hyperactivity, and total problem behavior as rated by teachers. See table 2 for these interview results.

These preliminary analyses thus suggest several important aspects of socialization of emotions which will be followed up with larger samples. It appears that mothers' expression of emotions and their pattern of coping with each do have bearing on the child's own expression of emotions, understanding of emotions, and coping with emotions, such as the anger associated with aggression, in a social setting. For example, mothers who are more often expressing high level negative emotions may be impeding their children's understanding of emotions because of the children's resultant anxiety; more finely delineated studies will be required to tease out such possibilities.

Table 1

Correlations of Maternal Emotion Variables and Child Variables

Child Variables	Maternal Variables: Explain[a]	Apology[a]	Anger[b]	Tension[b]
Happy[c]	.51**	.22	.14	-.01
Sad	-.09	.01	.51**	.27
Angry	-.31*	.11	-.17	-.23
Hurt	.20	.48*	-.05	.01
Emotional Expressiveness	.44*	.43*	.14	-.09
Prosocial Behavior[d]	-.05	-.04	-.52**	-.50**
Ignore Others' Emotions[d]	-.63**	-.30	-.08	.10
Baumrind Aggregate	.58**	.04	.06	.10
PBQ Aggressive	-.49**	-.17	-.16	-.26
PBQ Unhappy/ Miserable	.00	-.46*	-.09	-.24
PBQ Hyperactive	-.74***	-.20	-.16	-.08
Peer Status	-.10	.06	-.56**	-.39*
Affective Knowledge	-.18	-.37*	-.76**	-.63**

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$.

[a] Interview data. [b] Diary data. [c] Observational emotion variables. [d] Reactions to others' emotions.

Table 2

Effect of Maternal Interview Variables on Child Variables

Child Variables	Maternal Variables F	p
	Helpfulness of Anger	
Achievement[a]	5.67	.02
Purposiveness	4.98	.02
Tractability	2.86	.09
Cooperativeness	18.31	.001
Friendliness	3.02	.08
Baumrind Aggregate	15.48	.001
PBQ Aggressiveness	8.80	.01
PBQ Hyperactivity	11.62	.001
Total PBQ Behavior Problems	14.25	.001
	Apology for Sadness	
Achievement	13.57	.01
Purposiveness	6.83	.02
Cooperativeness	2.64	.12
Baumrind Aggregate	8.34	.01
Total PBQ Behavior Problems	3.45	.08
	Apology for Tension	
Independence	7.62	.01
Dominance	9.27	.01
Tractability	4.65	.05

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